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ABSTRACT

Discussion focuses on models of and approaches to meaningful parent involvement in the education of their children and themselves; the need for innovation in family-school relationships; and five barriers that prevent or impede parent involvement. Models include those derived from early childhood education and school partnerships with parents as policymakers, as volunteers in the program, and as facilitators of children's development. Barriers include physical or psychological distance between teachers and parents, lack of teacher training, race and class biases, limited views of parental involvement, and perceptions of the school as limited to the provision of instruction. Concluding remarks emphasize that the creation of an atmosphere of cooperation and understanding between schools and parents will require a dramatic change in the way in which our nation views its schools. It is pointed out that if children are to meet new academic challenges and realize success, the nation's schools must evolve to the point where parents and schools capitalize on each other's knowledge and abilities. Mutual partnership between parents and schools will ensure that all children arrive at school each day ready to receive an education. Appended is a parent resource guide describing 18 experiences that promote children's development and prepare them for school. (RH)

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INCREASING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

AS A MEANS OF IMPROVING OUR NATION'S SCHOOLS

PS 019174

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When the Governors met with President Bush at the Education Summit in the Fall of 1989, they established school readiness as the number one education goal. By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn. To emphasize the important role of parents in achieving this goal, the National Governors' Association issued a later report stating:

> We have learned what it takes to make a positive, permanent difference in the lives of young children. The most essential elements are responsible parents and a healthy, nurturing home life. Unfortunately, these elements are absent for many children and often must be supplemented by services and programs.

Thus, the report goes on to conclude that attaining universal school readiness will require new programs which expand "parent education and support," and strengthen "parental responsibility and involvement." Specifically, it concludes that states should:

- Offer quality support and education services to parents.
- Expand parent education courses and home visit programs that teach new parents how to create a healthy home environment for their child.
- Develop networks for parents to help each other with common problems.
- Link parents with services they may need such as health care, child care, adult literacy programs, counseling, employment services, and substance abuse treatment.
- Create alternative strategies and different levels of resources to recruit parents with more serious problems and meet their needs.

The call for more parent participation at all these levels in public schools appears in a number of other recent national reports. In addition to the National Governors' Association, the National Association of Black School Educators, National Association of School Boards of Education, the Institute for Responsive Education, and the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) have identified parent participation as a key factor in the improvement of public school education for at risk children.

Among these, **Incubator for Inequality** (NBCDI, 1988) clearly documents the dismal track record of public schools in educating African American children, particularly those who live in poverty, and makes six important recommendations for public-school-based developmental programs for children who come from a community that is largely poor and from a community that for the most part does not have easy access to power structures. Two recommendations speak directly to parent involvement and family supports:

1. **Parent involvement and responsibilities.** In order for the schools to offer continuity to the experiences of the home, they should complement parental preferences and standards. To reach this goal, Black parents must be involved in the design and development of their child's learning program; and

2. **Family support.** To help Black children develop and to help their families carry out their responsibilities, programs serving lower income Black families must offer comprehensive services to the child and his or her family including education in parenting skills as well as assistance for health problems, psychological problems, or social service needs.

National efforts to launch such new programs will require new resources and take a great deal of technical expertise and innovative thinking. States, however, will not be without models. Parent involvement strategies have been a part of early childhood education programs for a long time. Although many of these programs have been developed outside the formal structure of the state education agencies, (i.e., the schools), the models that have been created as well as the lessons learned could be adapted for implementation within school systems.

For purposes of this discussion, my comments will be divided into two sections. First, I will present models of and approaches to meaningful parent involvement in the education of their children as well as themselves. I will also address the need for innovation in light of the new realities being faced by children and their families. Second, I will delineate five barriers that prevent or impede parent involvement. Both sections will provide the reader with an understanding of what our nation must do to help our schools begin the processes of

implementing parental involvement strategies and of meeting the changing needs of the school-age population.

MODELS OF INVOLVING PARENTS IN THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN

Parent Involvement: What it is when it is at its best.

Ideally, the key element in the kind of parent involvement that most benefits the growth and development of children is the sense of partnership between the parent and school: an understanding that it takes both to make possible positive outcomes for children. Where this key element is found, the program communicates its belief that both parent and teacher are necessary to the success of children, and that neither alone is sufficient.

Programs must not only believe in this concept, but must also articulate what each partner brings to the partnership: that parents are not only their child's first teacher, but they are his/her anchor to the security which provides the continuity for his/her growth. Only parents can be the tie that binds together all the child's life experiences, and help children integrate what they will learn from schools and from other places. Teachers, on the other hand, provide a more technical expertise -- they enter and exit the child's life at different stages, and supply information and resources. They deal with children's growth "in the present," and have a depth of knowledge about subject matter content and skills, as well as individual variations in behavior and learning styles. This concept is quite different from what we sometimes see where teachers believe that parents are the child's first teacher until the "real" teacher comes along (the one at school), or where parents believe that the school has complete domain over teaching once they enroll their child.

In order for such a cooperative spirit to prevail, both sides of the partnership must acknowledge the scope and contributions of each and the necessity of the reciprocal relationship. The program must communicate its belief in this partnership by sending consistent messages through the attitudes of the staff, the structure of parent involvement, and the way in which the activities are implemented. Whether the involvement takes place at the level of policy making, volunteerism, or parent development, what is required for success is a common sense of mission between the parent and the school. Both sides must believe that neither side can do alone for children what children need, and that both are collectively responsible and a necessary part of the partnership.

When this concept of joint partnership is embedded in the relations between parent and school, accountability is guaranteed. Parents expect teachers to do their share, and teachers expect parents to do their share. It would be unthinkable for either side to ignore any breakdown in function or communication. Solving problems becomes the responsibility of both. Currently, this ideal vision of parent-school partnership does not exist in the public schools to any significant degree. Yet early childhood education can offer strategies which emerge from such a conceptualization, for historically, these programs for very young children have been grounded in a partnership between the school and the parent.

Approaches to Parent Involvement

During the early years of nursery school education, co-operative nurseries embodied a firm relationship between the parent and the school for preschool-age children. The cooperative nursery was, in fact, organized by parents and probably represents one of the early efforts of "community controlled schooling." Parents served as the Boards of Directors of the nurseries; parents hired and fired the teacher; and parents assumed the important role of teacher

assistants in the classroom. Indeed, parents were required to put in a certain number of hours in order for their child to be enrolled in the school. Family involvement in the education of their children was an essential criterion in determining whether or not a school was successful. Thus, beginning in these preschools, parents learned the ropes of negotiating their children's educations.

With the advent of the idea of early childhood education as social intervention, preschool programs expanded to serve significantly larger numbers of low-income families. Consequently, the concept of partnership between parent and school took on an added dimension -- that of providing to parents a wide range of resources needed to make children more school ready.

In 1962, the Perry Preschool Program in Ypsilanti, Michigan was initiated for disadvantaged three- and four-year-old children. This program offered a highly stimulating educational program combined with a home visit component. Teachers visited the children's homes to help parents learn how to "teach" their own children often leaving educational materials. Special workshops were held for parents to learn more about positive ways to interact with their children.

In 1964, Head Start, which was launched for economically disadvantaged preschool children, again expanded the options for "parent partnerships" with schools. In addition to serving as classroom volunteers and participating in parent education, parents became paid teacher assistants, acted as social work aides and community liaisons, received training in early childhood education, health and social services, and were given opportunities to participate in formal education leading to professional certification. Moreover, parents served on the Board of Directors, participating in program design and evaluation. In other words, parents became an integral part of the total Head Start Program.

The success of parental involvement in Head Start has influenced many early childhood programs which have developed since, such as Project Follow Through, Chapter I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and Title XX Day Care. While the approaches to parent involvement are as diverse as the program types, they all share a conviction that parents are an integral part of the effort to ensure children's success in school, particularly children from at risk families.

Although the early childhood education movement has yielded viable strategies for parent involvement, perhaps more important are the models which have emerged for achieving partnerships between parents and schools.

I. Partnerships with parents as policy makers.

This approach to parent involvement stresses empowering parents as decision-makers in the structure and implementation of school policies. Their role is primarily viewed as sharing control over the school program in general, or over specific aspects of the school program.

In this approach, parents contribute at the school level to decisions, such as budget resolutions, personnel selection, and curriculum options, either collectively through a representative body, or through committee membership. The Head Start program design is an excellent example in which parents make up the majority membership of the Policy Council. Other models of this approach can be found among private schools, in Chapter I programs, and among other community based preschool programs.

Parent involvement at this level requires that schools develop strategies to live with the natural tension that exists over traditional territoriality. That is, decision-making at the policy level is often viewed as the domain of highly trained and experienced education administrators or teachers. Sharing control with parents who are perceived as inexperienced, untrained, or "transient" can run such an approach aground. Parents as policy-makers only works if school personnel are convinced of the benefits of such an approach, and are willing to do the work that may be involved in orienting parents for responsible and informed participation.

II. Partnerships with parents as volunteers in the program.

This approach to parent involvement stresses including parents as "person power" for accomplishing the program objectives. Mainly seen as a corps of volunteers, although sometimes nurtured as a potential personnel pool, parents participate in classrooms and school events to assist teachers to achieve the program's goals.

In this approach, parents are asked to chaperone field trips, sew bean bags, send empty milk cartons for art projects, be classroom helpers, or assist with special projects such as raising money to buy equipment and supplies. Nearly every early childhood program in existence considers this type of partnership with parents as fundamental, and programs often define parent involvement solely in this way.

Maintaining the involvement of parents at this level poses continuing challenges for schools for it requires ongoing vigilance in light of the changing demographic profile of the parent population. New variations of traditional strategies may be needed for programs serving families with mothers in the workforce, and lower income families with fewer resources to share with the school.

III. **Partnerships with parents as facilitators of children's development.**

This approach to parent involvement stresses building parents' capabilities to contribute to the educational success of their own children. Their role is viewed both as their child's primary "educator" as well as primary "advocate."

In this approach, parents are counseled about how to enrich their children's lives -- through education about effective parenting, through information about enrichment activities outside school, and through strategies to negotiate health and social service agencies in the community. The forum for these discussions is often the "parent meeting" where experts on various topics are invited to speak, though sometimes the exchange takes place during a one-to-one conference or home visit.

Where parents are absent, either physically or psychologically, or where there is no value continuity between parent and school, successful parent involvement of this kind is difficult to achieve. While all parents want their children to grow up strong and successful, some may be without the energy or resources to contribute much to the process. Further, where the content and approach to "parent education" reflect class, race, or culture bias, parents may find little with which to identify or from which to learn.

This conceptualization of the three parent-school partnerships I have briefly described above is neither intended as an analysis (a quite good one appears in Doug Powell's recent book, *Families and Early Childhood Programs*), nor an evaluation. Rather, it serves to point out that while there has been a uniform commitment to parent involvement in early childhood education, what may appear to be uniform practice is in fact multidimensional. Although each approach involves parents as partners in their children's education, each views parents' involvement in a fundamentally different way -- one as decision-maker, one as extra helper, and one as co-educator.

Whether one view better benefits children than the other and under what circumstances, is at the moment unknown. In fact, we know that when it comes to parent education and support, the differences across programs with regard to theoretical and procedural approaches are significant.[1] Yet, we have no well developed database about these, nor refined research on their differential effectiveness. Experience tells us however, that as we seek to increase and support parent involvement in public school settings, a sure way to communicate a solid commitment to partnerships is to build in some strategies that maintain a multidimensional (comprehensive) approach -- one which seeks parent participation in policy making, in program implementation, and in improving parents' capabilities to foster their children's development.

REMOVING THE BARRIERS FOR PARENTS

A discussion of facilitating the involvement of parents throughout the education of their children could not be more timely, particularly for children in urban settings. Improved partnerships between schools and parents are being attempted in major cities across the country, such as Chicago, where site-based management is being piloted on a large scale, and New Haven, which follows the work of Dr. James Comer and emphasizes parental involvement as a key to academic achievement. Schools are now acknowledging that parent participation should be an essential part of the public educational process. Thus, to ensure that parents are included in the education of children of all ages, we must confront and remove any potential barriers to this process. In the author's opinion, the obstacles which most inhibit parental

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[1]Douglas R. Powell, Families and Early Childhood Programs, (Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1989), pp. 89-112.

involvement in today's schools include: 1) distance between teachers and parents; 2) the lack of teacher training; 3) race and class biases; 4) limited view of parental involvement; and 5) the perception of the school.

Barrier # 1: Distance Between Teachers and Parents.

Distance, defined as either physical or psychological space, prevents parents and teachers from face to face contact. The more obstructions placed between the parent and teacher, the harder it becomes to bond together for joint responsibility.

Some schools have become formidable places even for parents to enter. Barred entrances and gates, lack of signs directing visitors to the main office, and inattentive or gruff office personnel can make a parent's visit to the school feel like an intrusion into a place where one is neither expected nor wanted. While security has become a high priority in some urban schools, this atmosphere can work against a parent's sense of feeling welcomed in a school building. Further, once in a school facility, if there's no decent, comfortable, adult space for parent and teacher to talk together, a parent again can feel unwelcome.

Sometimes obstructions also include the administrative structure of personnel. Where positions are created in the school specifically to work with parents, such as the "community outreach worker," teachers "report" problems with children which are then followed up by a third party who contacts parents either by telephone or home visit. Although the evolution of this staff position may be well justified, (teachers do not have ample time nor the required training to meet all the needs of families), the presence of such personnel removes the teacher one person away from direct contact with parents. From both the parent's perspective and the teacher's, what is communicated is that their work together on behalf of the child must be mediated through a third party. This is quite different from the model where teacher contacts parent, talks, and then

if needed, **BOTH** go together to the appropriate specialist, where they work collectively to resolve a problem. The teacher remains the point of contact for everything regarding the child.

Barrier # 2: Lack of Teacher Training.

The teacher is the glue and needs to be given the time, training, and the resources to hold together the parent - school partnership.

Most teacher training programs today reflect the realities of twenty to thirty years ago. Therefore, teachers are not prepared to manage the situations they find when they enter the classrooms of today. Teachers working in areas where there are high risk families may need in-service training to develop some clinical skills in order to effectively work with parents who may abuse drugs and alcohol, who may live in shelters, or who may not have homes. Even where living arrangements are intact and stable, the structures of families have changed, and more households are headed by single parents and more families have both parents in the workforce. All of these changes require teachers to adapt to meet the needs of parents and children.

A discussion of teacher preparedness also brings to the forefront an equally important issue: teacher recruitment, and in particular, the recruitment of teachers who look like the children. In NBCDI's **Safeguards: Guidelines for Establishing Programs for Four-Year-Olds in the Public Schools**, the third guideline speaks to this issue. School staff should include teachers who come from the community served by the program and who are racially and ethnically representative of the children served. Children need role models in the learning environment who are representative of their racial and ethnic makeup. In addition, parents are often more comfortable in settings where there is an adequate mix of staff by race and ethnic

origin, and where their own race is represented in key positions. Although the most important issue is not race, but **teacher effectiveness**, we must strive to recruit highly qualified minority teachers to ensure that race is not a barrier for children or parents.

Barrier # 3: Race and Class Biases.

Teachers and parents must overcome the invisible but not imaginary lines that are drawn based on race and class that prevent positive interaction.

For parental involvement to be meaningful, it must occur between people who view themselves as equals. While teachers and administrators encourage parental involvement, it is often a superficial involvement based on the notion that people who have less are less. When teachers and administrators, often members of the middle class, approach parents of low socioeconomic status with a patronizing air, they communicate their view of themselves as "superior", rather than as "peer". Unless the interaction between teachers and parents is equal, it will not be meaningful. Therefore, parents and teachers must engage in a reciprocal relationship devoid of prejudicial biases based on educational attainment and economic status.

Insensitivity toward people of low socioeconomic status goes beyond the classroom; it also pervades popular material for parents. Often the suggested educational activities in this type of literature unintentionally exclude low-income parents from engaging in the process of helping their children learn and acquire new skills. For example, many parenting books and magazines recommend that parents accumulate magazines, construction paper, colored chalk, tongue depressors, and scissors. These materials when employed in appropriate activities will help children develop eye-hand coordination, improve fine motor skills, and build self-confidence as they master new tasks. Although middle and upper income parents can easily follow these

suggestions and replicate learning projects, many low-income parents do not have access to the recommended materials. The unfortunate result is often that low-income children do not get to experience these types of educational activities until they are in school. For some of these learning projects, materials to which low-income parents have access, such as empty food containers, could be substituted. In addition, there are many activities that can promote learning, which do not require money or the ability to read. Libraries are excellent resources to which parents can bring children to listen to storytellers and to participate in educational activities. Parents can also borrow educational recordings from libraries. At home, parents can monitor television programs that their children watch and discuss the program themes and content. Parents can also treat their children to enriching experiences in the neighborhood and community. Any excursion can be a learning experience for children, from a trip to the grocery store to a visit to the fire station.[2]

To move away from superficial parental involvement and approach more meaningful interactions, we must examine honestly and realistically the race and class biases that we hold. Educators must realize that people with limited incomes and/or limited capabilities can comprehend the importance of education.

Barrier # 4: Limited View of Parental Involvement.

Parent programs must move beyond parent involvement to parent empowerment.

When involving parents in the education of their children, most parent involvement programs stress the basics: attending parent teacher conferences, visiting the classroom, and

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[2]Please see reference to NBCDI's **Giving Your Child A Good Start In School** in the appendix.

monitoring children's progress. However, in order to be truly beneficial, parental involvement programs must strive to teach parents to navigate the school system and to advocate for their children's educational experiences. Parental involvement programs should give parents the confidence that enables them to successfully negotiate on behalf of their children. They must not be afraid to speak with the principal or even to attend school board meetings to make suggestions. If parents are in this way empowered, they will feel that they have control over the educational outcomes of their children, rather than the school system controlling these outcomes.

Programs that strive for parent empowerment should stress certain elements that will prepare parents to make sure their children's educational needs are fulfilled.[3] First, parents must be trained to recognize and articulate their children's dispositions, attitudes, and behaviors. This information will enable parents to address areas that may encumber children's first learning experiences. For example, parents of an impatient child may need to work with that child on waiting for what he or she wants.

Second, parents must learn assertive, but non-confrontational, techniques for investigating the school that their child attends. Through friends and neighbors, the school district office, interviews with the child's principal and teachers, and classroom observation, parents will become more familiar with the child's educational environment. Third, after the parent has learned about the school, the parent must become aware of how to use this information to ensure that his of her child has the best possible educational experience. In

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[3]Negotiating Your Child's Experience in the Public Schools, (Washington, DC: The National Black Child Development Institute, 1989).

teaching parents these skills, parents learn to advocate effectively for their children's educational rights, and additionally, parents will be better able to help schools educate all children.

Moreover, to ensure that parents are empowered, educational materials, such as NBCDI's **Negotiating Your Child's Experience in the Public School,** must be developed and placed in the hands of parents and workshop facilitators. In addition, portable workshops, which travel around from school to school, and place to place within the community could be presented to parents to provide them with the learning necessary for full parental involvement. Workshops and materials must be simple, succinct, and appropriate for people of varying educational levels. Although literacy is important, no parent should be excluded from workshops or unable to access effective parenting materials simply because he or she cannot read.

Barrier # 5: **The Perception of the School.**

When most people think of school, they envision a structure whose sole purpose is the education of children. However, given our nation's changing demographics, schools may need to consider serving more functions.

NBCDI's **Twentieth Anniversary Report on the Status of African American Children** (1990) calls attention to three growing problems: 1) the lack of adequate, affordable housing in America has resulted in a large population of children whose families live in substandard or overcrowded homes, or are homeless; 2) the growing drug epidemic has become a national problem disrupting routine family functioning; and 3) increasing incidents of family violence has disrupted parent - child relationships.

The sheer magnitude of these crises can be overwhelming for families, both in terms of parents' abilities to contribute to the school success of their children and of the school's ability to involve parents in school life in meaningful ways. Nonetheless, some believe that public schools may be the most viable institution to deliver intervention strategies. However, in order for the school system to be effective in the delivery of expanded services, it must change its perception of itself such that it incorporates within its faculty, staff with resources and expertise to provide services other than instruction. Teachers, too, must be oriented to shift their view of their responsibilities such that parents (in addition to children) constitute their clientele. As long as the school envisions itself solely as an education system for children, it fails to incorporate mechanisms which address other dimensions of children's families' lives.

If schools are to serve families with serious problems, a dramatic restructuring will be required, such that the schools function as a hub for rebuilding families and reconnecting them with society. By restructuring our schools, we can provide families with services or referrals to services, such as health care, child care, drug prevention, and parent support groups. However, schools alone cannot provide all of the services families need. Businesses, government, community organizations, and parents must make a commitment to strengthen the schools' capacities to function as institutions of education and social support for children and families. Each has a separate and vital role in the process of expanding the influence of our schools. Businesses must create working environments that are conducive to parental involvement and that are supportive of new educational initiatives. For example, a recent study of school reform conducted by the Rand Corporation found that large school districts that experienced success in improving student achievement did so only with help from the business community.[4]

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[4]Paul T. Hill, Arthur E. Wilson, and Leslie Shapiro, **Educational Progress: Cities Mobilize to Improve their Schools**, (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation, January, 1989).

Government must play a role in school restructuring by enacting legislation to encourage and to supplement the educational services that schools currently offer. Community organizations must make some of their material and human resources available to the schools. Finally, parents must take advantage of the school's parental involvement programs and must become effective advocates to ensure the quality of their children's education. Through the united efforts of business, government, schools, and parents, our society can create a new type of school that offers holistic services to address all of our children's needs and that ultimately enables our children to realize success.

CONCLUSION

Our nation's prosperity depends on our efforts to ensure the vivacity of our children. Intervention strategies that reach high risk children in the early years and nurture parental involvement are the ideal methods for promoting children's welfare. The inclusion of parents in the educational process is of critical importance to children's educational achievement for three very important reasons. First, parents are the most powerful and permanent forces in children's lives. Parents' abilities to reinforce what is taught in school is one of the most significant determinants of children's abilities to master new material and develop new skills. Thus, schools must keep parents informed of children's academic materials and offer to help parents motivate their children to handle the schools' academic demands. Second, children's attitudes toward school are largely influenced by how their parents feel about the school. If the parents seem intimidated by or suspicious of the school and faculty, the children may display similar apprehensive behavior, which will inhibit the learning process. Therefore, it is important that schools welcome parents into their facilities, and that parents are made to feel comfortable and valued in discussing matters with teachers, administrators, and auxiliary school personnel.

Third, parents, having bonded with their children, have special insights that could be of help in schools' efforts to enrich each child's learning experiences. Consequently, this knowledge will facilitate the management of the classroom and the creation of a positive learning environment. Creating an atmosphere of cooperation and understanding between schools and parents will require a dramatic change in how our nation views its schools. However, if our children are to meet new academic challenges and realize success, our nation's schools must evolve to the point where parents and schools capitalize on each other's knowledge and abilities. The mutual partnership between parents and schools will ensure that all children arrive at school each day ready to receive an education.

APPENDIX

Giving Your Child A Good Start in School is a resource that NBCDI developed for parents to ensure their children are exposed to environments and experiences that foster good mental, emotional, and physical growth. Because of its simple format and helpful suggestions, **Giving Your Child A Good Start in School** is an excellent tool for staff of parent programs. Program staff could hold seminars based on the content of the booklet and distribute the booklet for parents to read and reference. The following excerpt from **Giving Your Child a Good Start in School** is designed to help parents and educators prepare children for the academic demands of school. Because all of the following activities do not reflect any race or class biases, low-income as well as middle and upper-income parents will be able to provide their children with enriching educational activities.

II. PRECURSORS TO SUCCESS: Experiences that promote development

From birth on, children learn naturally. Even the tiniest experience can be a learning one for a young child.

Think about the ways humans get information: we see, hear, touch, feel and taste. Babies do all these things at birth, but gradually come to rely on learning through seeing and hearing more than tasting, touching and feeling. Why? Because this society stresses looking, talking and listening: we take in information with our eyes, like when we read this book, and we give the information back in written form for someone else to read. We are a literate culture,

meaning the written word is a vitally important form of communication in which everyone must become proficient.

Black people have a culture which also emphasizes movement and expression of feeling. These are the strengths our children learn early in life through the ordinary, everyday family experiences provided by you. How can you make your children's early years of life rich in ways that will build their proficiency in the skills of their culture and the skills stressed by the wider society?

GIVE CHILDREN FIRST HAND EXPERIENCES DOING THINGS IN THE WORLD. Children need to see and touch objects, to hear real sounds, to taste and smell foods, to watch things move. The experience of television exposes them to many new ideas, but it can't compare to seeing things live. Watch their faces as they do things, and you will see the real joy of learning.

LET CHILDREN DO THINGS BY THEMSELVES. This is how they learn to be independent. Let them dress themselves and put away their own toys. Find tasks they can do around the house - water plants, set the table, polish their shoes, put the groceries away, measure soap for the laundry. When you go grocery shopping together, give them something to do. "Go find the bread and bring back one loaf." Through your instruction, they learn to follow simple directions.

GIVE CHILDREN CHOICES THAT THEY CAN MAKE RATHER THAN DECIDING EVERYTHING FOR THEM. This is how they learn to think for themselves and make decisions. Let them choose items of clothes to wear or where they want to sit at mealtime. Remember to only give them a choice when there really is one.

MAKE SURE CHILDREN PLAY WITH OTHER CHILDREN THEIR OWN AGE, AS WELL AS YOUNGER CHILDREN AND OLDER ONES. Many social skills come from interactions with other children, like learning how to share, and speaking up for what they want. Helping younger children gives them practice at doing things they are good at, playing with older ones helps them want to learn new things.

HAVE CHILDREN SPEND TIME WITH ADULTS OTHER THAN YOU – FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS. Children often behave in different ways around different people, and need to have a chance to learn to adjust their behavior according to different expectations. Besides, they will have many models of adult behavior to choose from as they mature.

PLAN OUTINGS WHERE CHILDREN GET OUT OF THEIR FAMILIAR SURROUNDINGS AND SEE SOMETHING NEW. Different kinds of buildings, sounds, sights and smells will stimulate their understanding of the world.

BUY TOYS THAT REQUIRE CHILDREN TO USE THEIR IMAGINATION. Remember dolls, blocks, cars and trucks? No batteries, no on-and-off switches, no digital printouts. Too many toys today do it all for children, leaving no ways for them to use their own ideas. Mix the kinds of toys you buy and don't forget lots of paper and crayons just for scribbling and making up drawings.

GIVE CHILDREN WHOLESOME MEALS AND SNACKS. Nothing is more important at these young ages than good nutrition, for children's growth is rapid and much of their body tissue, bones and teeth are still in formation. Foods with high nutritional value are important at every meal and every snack so that children have the energy they need.

WALK AROUND THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND GO PLACES ON THE BUS. Travel is exciting and educational, but children don't see much when you drive them -- your attention is

on the road, not on discussing the scenery. Walking trips and bus trips give you a chance to talk to your children about what you see and hear. Ask questions, but don't overwhelm your child with too many. Answer their questions with simple, truthful explanations. Finally, be a patient listener: you will encourage curiosity by your interest and attention and you will encourage their love for learning.

USE ADULT WORDS - THE REAL NAMES FOR THINGS, NOT BABY TALK. The most amazing accomplishment of early childhood is learning language. Within a few short years children learn all the grammar and sentence structure of their language by listening to you and the other people who talk to them. They understand much more than they are able to say, so always, **always** speak clearly and use words that will be understood by other people.

READ TO CHILDREN FREQUENTLY. Children love to listen to short stories, sometimes the same ones over and over again. Choose books with pictures and make sure the characters are not always cartoons. Find books with Black people in them and short stories they can remember and retell. Nursery rhymes and poems are favorites because rhyming sounds appeal to children. They will learn to repeat the verses they have heard you read over and over. Storytelling is fast becoming a lost art, but children always love to hear a story.

LISTEN WHILE CHILDREN READ TO YOU AND TELL STORIES. Find time to listen while children tell you stories. Perhaps they will want to pretend to "read" back to you the same books you have read to them. By looking at the pictures they get a chance to practice remembering stories they've heard and a chance to make up their own. Making mistakes doesn't matter, but you can help them hold the book right side up, and go from front to back.

BE A ROLE MODEL. Young children want to be exactly like you and they imitate the way you behave. Always set a positive example for children to imitate. For example, if you want them to value learning from books, read often yourself.

MAKE SURE CHILDREN GET LOTS OF EXERCISE. They don't need the organized kind of exercise you may need as an adult. But everyday, give them the chance to play using the big muscle body movements they use when they run, jump, skip, hop, dance, and throw. Besides burning up some of that restless energy young children have naturally, it will help them to become more coordinated, improve their appetites, and contribute to their overall good health.

LISTEN WHEN CHILDREN TALK TO YOU. Talking is one of the first ways children learn to express themselves. Though there are certain times when "children should be seen and not heard," you should allow your children frequent opportunities to talk to you at home. If you are busy, make some special time when you can give them your undivided attention. Don't wait for a crisis or a time when they have done something wrong to speak to your children.

GUIDE CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR WITH PRAISE. All of us know how much better it feels to get praised for a job well done than to get yelled at for making a mistake. Make sure your discipline includes plenty of positive reinforcement to help build children's self-esteem. Smiles and praise for the small things they do right go much further to shape good behavior than harsh punishment when they do something wrong. Remember the often quoted phrase: "If children live with criticism they learn to condemn; if children live with approval, they learn to like themselves."

GIVE CHILDREN PLENTY OF TIME TO PLAY. Play is children's work -- it is how they become proficient at the skills they will need growing up: comparing, manipulating, choosing, grouping, giving names to things. It comes so naturally as a learning activity that they will play without any instruction or assistance from adults. Allow them ample time and space for play:

limit the hours the television set is turned on in your home so children can enjoy the full value of play.

GET REGULAR MEDICAL CHECK-UPS AND IMMUNIZATIONS. Because children's physical health is critical to their overall well-being, regular visits to a health care professional are a must, even when a child is not sick. Many childhood diseases can be prevented by vaccines, and doctors can give you tips on keeping your child healthy.

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Of course, these are not the only experiences that promote children's development, although they are important ones. You may find other ideas by talking to your own parents, or by participating in discussions focused on children. Some communities have parent discussion groups at libraries or community centers. These provide a chance to talk about your child and hear other parents talk about what their children are like. Some communities have preschool programs like Head Start, day care, or nursery schools. These can provide a group play experience for children and opportunities for them to be exposed to new toys and materials, as well as friendships with children their own age. In addition, they provide <u>you</u> with teachers and other adults who can share with you their expert knowledge about the growth and development of young children.

Besides considering these concrete experiences that promote development, there is another issue facing Black parents in particular, which will require some thought as you prepare your child for school: cultural history. This has become quite important in recent years because schools have debated its role in the school curriculum.